

A NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT AT STACEY BUSHES, MILTON KEYNES

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The Late Neolithic settlement at Stacey Bushes (site ref. MK 228) was excavated by Stephen Green in August 1974. An interim report appeared shortly afterwards (Green 1976) and the site has since received mention 'in all the textbooks as [presenting] the latest known date for the survival of early Neolithic pottery' (Current Archaeology 90 (1984) 198-9). The following report is the definitive account of the site's excavation.

The structures discovered included borrow trenches dug into Jurassic (Blisworth) clay, possibly to provide material for houses of wattle and daub or cob construction and/or for use in pottery manufacture; and arc- and banana-shaped gulleys, probably for drainage around houses, dug into the Cornbrash limestone. A mixed flint industry of Mesolithic and late Neolithic date was found. Plain Neolithic (Grimston style) and Grooved Ware pottery occurred in direct association in the deliberate infill of one of the borrow trenches. An uncalibrated radiocarbon date of 1830 ± 150 b.c. (HAR-858) was obtained for this association. The excavated features showed the consistent fill of reddish-brown soil typical of some archaeological sites of Sub-Boreal date located on subsoils of, or containing, limestone. Molluscan analysis suggests the presence of local woodland and the identification of charcoal fragments from fairly large timbers may imply that clearance was taking place. Petrological analysis by Stephanie Sofranoff of Neolithic and Bronze Age ceramics from Stacey Bushes and nearby sites in the Upper Ouse Valley indicates a tradition of local pottery manufacture.

THE GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The Geology

The area excavated is situated on the feather edge of the basal Cornbrash Limestone outcrop on the south-eastern facing slope of a tributary of the Loughton Brook (Fig. 1). This limestone forms part of the upper Jurassic system of the Mesozoic period and is overlain by Kellaways Beds and underlain by the Blisworth Clay. The limestone is divided in this area into the Upper and Lower Cornbrash, but where exposed in the excavation the upper part of the Lower and the whole of the Upper Cornbrash are absent due to erosion.

The Cornbrash is here seen as a bluish-grey, slightly weathered, medium to thickly bedded,

moderately strong, slightly shelly oolitic limestone which has a very gentle regional dip in a southerly direction. At the site of the excavation the limestone is moderately jointed and where undisturbed the thin flaggy limestone fragments have their principal axis horizontal. In the road cutting on the edge of the excavation a section is seen which shows the competent limestone to have moved downslope under the influence of gravity, over the incompetent underlying Blisworth Clay, producing a slightly steeper dip to the south. This slight movement under gravity, which has little effect on the *in situ* limestone other than to increase the dip, is known as cambering.